

## The Third Sunday before Advent

**The Collect:** Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

*or*

God, our refuge and strength, bring near the day when wars shall cease and poverty and pain shall end, that earth may know the peace of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Post Communion Prayer:** God of peace, whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom and restored the broken to wholeness of life: look with compassion on the anguish of the world, and by your healing power make whole both people and nations; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **Bible Readings: Jonah 3:1-5 & 10**

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' <sup>3</sup> So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' <sup>5</sup> And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

### **Mark 1:14-20**

#### **The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry**

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news<sup>[i]</sup> of God,<sup>[i]</sup> <sup>15</sup> and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;<sup>[k]</sup> repent, and believe in the good news.'

#### **Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

<sup>16</sup> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

## **Sermon: Repent and Live under God's Reign**

I wonder, did anyone see the video of the dinosaur speaking at the UN? "Listen up people," the T-Rex says, "I know a thing or two about extinction...and let me tell you... going extinct is a bad thing." "And driving yourselves extinct. IN 70 million years that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. At least we had an asteroid. What's your excuse?"

It's a rather lighthearted, but at the same time very powerful clip about the seriousness of climate change.

I have been really wound up and upset over recent weeks with COP26 and hearing the science and the debate and the political responses and protests. Perhaps I should have just shut my eyes and ears as I found myself going through frustration, concern, sadness and anger? Thankfully the dinosaur video kept me engaged!

The future of many nations and peoples and habitats is in danger because of the changes in the climate brought about by human behaviour. We have heard the phrase 'existential threat!' The very existence of humanity and the environment as we know it is under threat.

In church we understand the concept of an outward sign having an inward and spiritual meaning. The state of the planet seems to me like an outward and visible sign... a manifestation of the inward problems of humanity. The Evangelist J John uses the expression "The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.' Perhaps the pollution of the planet is a reflection of how polluted our spiritual lives have become. The contempt towards creation is perhaps a reflection of the contempt towards to the Creator.

There needs to be a change, big change or are we not on the road to self-destruction and possible extinction? Brothers and sisters in Christ we need to change... yes, "they" need to change... but I, me and we need to change. Our hearts need to be constantly realigned to God. Our individual and our corporate lives need to be brought more under the reign of God and that includes our relationship with the world in which God has placed us and made us stewards.

Throughout the last century Christians have often been distant from environmental issues, partly because of a Titanic theology that sees the world as a sinking ship and we need to rescue as many souls as we can before it's gone... it's ALL about 'what's next.' Christians have also not wanted to align themselves with pagan, new age religion and associated politics.

Yet as Christians we believe that God's creation is very good and that the material matter matters to God so much so that He enters wholly into it. Christians take seriously the Scriptural command to care for God's creation... to be good stewards (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15) and to treat this not as just a passing place to reside but a practice run of the new creation to come. "If I knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow I'd still plant a tree."

The UN T-Rex could have been Jonah. Jonah was God's agent in telling the people of Nineveh to repent and change their ways or they would be destroyed. God spoke to Jonah and called him to be his messenger. His response was at first, to say the least, one of reluctance.

God says, "Jonah, I've got a job for you. Get up and go to that great city of Nineveh (Northern Iraq). Cry out against that wicked city and all the wayward people who live there."

So what does Jonah do? He gets up and he goes alright. He goes to the city of Joppa and then on to the Mediterranean Sea where he hops aboard a ship that's going in the opposite direction. God says, "Go east to Nineveh." Jonah heads west to Tarshish, somewhere in Southern Spain as opposed to going to Northern Iraq.

Jonah is very reluctant to hear God's message and be God's messenger. I get that! I get being reluctant! When God wants me to do something I don't want to do I can be reluctant!

But God doesn't give up on us when we're reluctant! We see that here with Jonah. Eventually after the fish scenario Jonah does what God asks and the results are spectacular with the full and utter repentance of the Ninevites, even if Jonah is rather peeved!

No wonder Jonah ran from God the first time! He was a Jewish prophet in Assyria (Assyrians and Jews didn't like each other at all), shouting to the people that they were going to be destroyed!

The story of Jonah is also a reminder that vocation and calling is not always about what 'we' want to be or do. It's about what God wants us to be or do. And yes, God does call us to address things in our lives and in our world that we'd rather avoid, dismiss and ignore, like the environment or political issues, or our behaviour, or the wellbeing of our church, Parish and ourselves

Sometimes God calls us to do the impossible or the ridiculous. Be a voice crying out in the wilderness. A peacemaker in the midst of war. Get involved in political realm. Be a voice of love and reconciliation in the midst of hatred and division. Start a charity! Be a voice of forgiveness in the midst of great wrong. Sometimes it's just uncomfortable... feed the hungry, befriend the outcast, serve the church and community, invite the irritating neighbour for a meal or a friend to church.

Sometimes God calls us to do what's necessary, like receive or pass on a message, "Change your ways because if you carry on like this it could lead to your destruction."

God doesn't want our destruction. He wants us to live in intimate fellowship with him and in harmony with one another and the whole of creation so we might live life to the full.

As we read in Jonah, Jonah was very happy for the people of Ninevah to be destroyed. However, God wasn't happy for that! God doesn't want our destruction! *"That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a **gracious** God and **merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.**" [Jonah 4:2]*

Unfortunately, there are plenty of human beings who are quite happy for other human beings to be destroyed.

Whether it's easy, hard, lovely, uncomfortable or costly Jesus calls us to follow him and serve him and allow him to reign in our lives, and to declare that reign through deed and word day by day, so that we might live life in all its fullness.

At a baptism we sometimes use a scallop shell to pour the water over the candidate. And at the baptism preparation session I will ask parents and godparents, "why do you think we use a scallop shell? Imagine this answer is worth £250,000?"

The answer of course if that first disciples were fishermen and they left their nets to follow Jesus... to follow the way, the truth and the life. The scallop shell is a symbol of pilgrimage and a reminder that following Jesus is a decision to journey life with Jesus as Lord, a decision that can mean a whole amendment of life, a decision that can be costly and challenging as we live it out day to day.

Both those called by God to be his servant and deliver a message and those who hear the message have a responsibility to respond.

I give you the message today... as a reluctant Jonah... If we would but repent... and change our ways then destruction in our lives and planet will not happen. Let us amend our lives and commit ourselves afresh to live under the reign of Christ Jesus our Lord and pass on the Good News of the Gospel of love, peace, joy and transformation.